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The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 161 NOVEMBER 25TH, 1942

DEAR MEMBER,

The Lord Privy Seal said a few days ago that it was to the fearless leadership of the Church that we must look for a Christian solution of the overwhelming problems that will confront us after the war. Much will have to happen to the Church before it can meet the spiritual and intellectual requirements of genuine leadership, but the possibility of such a mission is one that we cannot rule out of our hopes, our prayers and our resolve. But whatever may be the tasks and opportunities given to the Churches of the United Nations now and in the future, we cannot forget as members of the universal Church that to our sister Churches on the Continent there has been assigned a very different rôle. The call to them has been to witness to their faith by suffering.

You will recall that in a recent Supplement (C.N-L. No. 144) Miss Barbara Ward pointed out that in the clean sweep of European cultural traditions made by the Nazis the Churches over a large part of the Continent are practically the only institutions which remain as a continuous link with Europe's past, and that as such they are of enormous potential importance for the rebuilding of Europe. How far the Nazis will succeed in blotting out even these last vestiges of the European tradition, or how far the Churches will survive the storm and become living centres of regeneration no man can foresee. We can only take note of what is happening and give to our fellow-Christians our sympathies and our prayers.

THE CHURCH IN POLAND

In Poland the fate of the Church is bound up with that of the nation. For nearly three years the sufferings of the whole Polish people under German rule have been almost beyond our power to comprehend. Far more Poles have been killed by shooting, by torture in concentration camps, by exposure during deportation and by starvation than were killed during the military conquest of the country. It is unlikely that more than a remnant of the Jewish population will survive. It has been estimated that 700,000 Jews have been massacred ; in the Warsaw ghetto there are 6,000 deaths a month. The brutality of those in power exceeds anything that has been known in the Christian era. The Germans are making *Lebensraum* for their own people. Only those Poles who are useful to them, the peasant population, are to survive in any numbers, and they are to be ruled by terror ; failure to produce the required agricultural quota may result in torture, imprisonment or death. Poland's criminal code is now based on the principle of collective responsibility. If a crime against a German is committed there is no attempt to find the guilty person ; ten, twenty, a hundred or even three hundred Poles are shot, imprisoned or deported. Frequently villages are ordered to select their own hostages.

In such a world order as this there is no room for the Christian Church. The pillaging and burning of churches has been accompanied by a persecution of the priesthood unsurpassed in its ruthlessness. Seven bishops have been deported and 90 per cent of the clergy imprisoned or exiled—a total of 2,700. In the two Archdioceses of Poznan and Gniezno where there were 828 priests, 86 were murdered by the Gestapo and 451 sent to

concentration camps, 34 are left to serve a population of over two millions. To talk of resistance in Poland is impossible. All that is left to the people is to cling in their hearts to a faith, the public expression of which in worship is for the time being denied to them.[1]

The treatment of the Evangelical Churches is especially worth noting, because it proceeds from an identification of religion with nationality. The *Polish Fortnightly Review* [2] has devoted the whole of a recent number to a survey of the history of these Churches.

Poland came under the influence of both Luther and Calvin, and by the middle of the sixteenth century the Reformation had a strong hold on all classes in the country ; but the counter-Reformation and the work of the Jesuits won the greater part of the country back to allegiance to Rome. Almost alone of the countries in Europe, however, Poland passed through this great upheaval without religious persecution and without civil war. In no country was there so great a measure of toleration, and for this reason Poland became the asylum of both Catholic and Protestant refugees from other countries. The evangelicals continued as a smaller body, deprived intermittently of their civil and religious liberty, but never threatened with total extinction. When Poland ceased to exist as a political unit, the spirit of Polish nationalism persisted among the evangelicals very strongly, flaming up into occasional revolt. German merchants coming into Poland to settle and trade during the nineteenth century were so thoroughly absorbed into the Polish Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession that in two generations their German origin was entirely forgotten.

From the time of the occupation the Germans set themselves to get rid of the Polish element in the evangelical Churches. The leaders were imprisoned or killed, and all Polish pastors were transported. Church property, including some of the finest schools in Poland, hospitals, co-operative saving banks, and publishing houses were confiscated or destroyed. The German authorities, with the active co-operation of the German minority in the Churches, have adopted the principle that an evangelical cannot be a Pole ; he must be a German or be destroyed. German pastors preach the messiahship of Hitler and use the machinery of the evangelical Churches as an arm of the German state. Polish evangelicals have had to take to an underground existence and can worship only in their homes.

THE CHURCH IN NORWAY

In Norway the Church, though attacked and persecuted, has not been crushed, and its staunch resistance has met with some measure of success.

The original aim of the Germans in Norway was to rule the country by using existing state institutions and as far as possible Norwegian personnel. The army of occupation was strictly instructed not to interfere in any political matters or to take action unless called on by the German security police. An attempt was made to use every state institution in turn. The Norwegian Parliament, when called upon to depose King Haakon, played a long delaying action and compelled the Germans to depose him themselves. The judges of the supreme court resigned in a body when the freedom of their courts was tampered with. Norway had, therefore, to be ruled by a *Reichskommissar* (Terboven). A special " people's court " was appointed to decide political cases without appeal.

It was against the state subversion of law and order that the bishops made their first protest. The next protest was against the compulsory enrolment of all young people between ten and eighteen in the Quisling youth formation. On this issue all the clergy in Norway resigned their offices (and with them their salaries, which are paid through the state administration), and so took their stand beside the 12,000 teachers who had already protested against this decree. The teachers had also a battle of their own with the State. All but 550 out of a total of 14,000 refused to join the Quisling teachers' organization.

[1] The facts in the preceding paragraphs are taken in the main from a pamphlet *Bestiality*, published by the Polish Ministry of Information, Stratton Street, W. 1, price 6d.

[2] No. 53, Oct. 1st, 1942, Polish Ministry of Information.

This led to the arrest of 700 teachers, who were sent to the Grini concentration camp or to forced labour in Norway. These arrests raised the anger of the people to fever pitch. Crowds of parents thronged the railway stations when the arrested teachers were taken away. Children chalked slogans on the walls, and sang the national anthem as they passed the German headquarters on their compulsory march to the Hitler Youth exhibition in Oslo. Meanwhile, the arrested teachers went back to their schools after a break of two months and read to their classes a declaration of their reasons for refusing to join the Quisling teachers' organization, including the words : " I will never ask you to do anything which I consider to be wrong, nor will I teach you anything which in my opinion is not in accordance with the truth." In August most of the arrested teachers were released. No teachers have been compelled to join the Quisling organization, although a sum equivalent to the subscription is deducted from their salaries.

There are two points of great significance in this four-fold struggle of Church, schools, parents and children. One is the extraordinary degree of unity which has been shown in the face of cruel hardship. The second is the fact that it is the Nazi threat to dominate the minds of the young which is seen by the whole nation as the hard and bitter core of Nazism, the thing which above all others must be resisted to the death.

The bishops and clergy of the Norwegian Church have rendered the machinery of the Church useless in the hands of the Quisling authorities. Instead they have set up a Provisional Church Administration. This body has sent a message to all its pastors and congregations which shows clearly how the Church itself regards its struggle :—

" The aim of the struggle is not of a *political* nature. Within the framework of international law we adopt a loyal attitude to the occupying power. And even if we have had to take up the struggle against the interference of the present State leaders against Church, school, parents and children, law and order, and freedom of conscience, this struggle has no political motive. . . .

" The aim is of a *spiritual* nature. We have not taken this struggle upon ourselves in order to break up the State Church or set up a free national Church or a free Church. We are fighting for the Church ; we are not fighting for any kind of church order, but for the inmost nature and dearest right of the Church, for its God-given mission to proclaim God's Word and live its own special life within the State."

SWITZERLAND

By the German and Italian occupation of France, Switzerland is now completely surrounded by Axis territory and cut off from the rest of the world. The chief headquarters of the Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches is at Geneva, and other world Christian organizations are also established there. Our friends in Switzerland and France need to be supported by our prayers.

CORRECTION

When a slip of any kind is made in the News-Letter, there are always readers with competent knowledge to detect it and call me to account. Mistakes are due sometimes to negligence ; sometimes to the impossibility of touching on a large subject in a sentence or paragraph without leaving important facts and aspects out of account. Both factors contributed to two errors in the News-Letter of a fortnight ago.

I am told that there is no evidence that Drake and Ralegh engaged in the slave-trade—certainly not as principals, and that Drake in particular was distinguished among his fellow-mariners for his really remarkable dealings with native peoples. The idea that I wanted to convey was that, if these famous men, whose names I took from the article I was criticizing, participated (a fact which I omitted to verify) in the slave-trade with their contemporaries, like Sir John Hawkins who did undertake slave-trading voyages on a big scale, there were also forces in the nation which in the end brought about its abolition.

Again, in regard to Warren Hastings, my intention was not to pass judgment on his character and career, though this was not made sufficiently clear, but to bring out the point that his trial provided the occasion for Burke to enunciate principles in regard to the exercise of political power over other peoples as a trust, which have had a profound and permanent influence on the whole British conception of the meaning of empire. We have often failed to live up to them, but they have been a leaven constantly at work. In regard to Warren Hastings himself, I am reminded by one of our members, who has himself devoted close study to the subject, that more recent research has in many respects corrected Macaulay's picture, and that there are good grounds for regarding him as not only a great but essentially a just and humane man.

CHRISTMAS GIFT SUBSCRIPTIONS

Very many of our members have in the past three years made a subscription to the Christian News-Letter a Christmas gift to their friends. This is one way in which you can help to make the News-Letter more widely known. The move back to London, the formation of the Christian Frontier and the enlargement of our staff should enable us to give better service in the future than in the past, and to achieve more fully our aim of reflecting in the News-Letter what is best in Christian thought and action at the present time.

Paper restrictions do not permit us to send to our members this year, as formerly, a special Christmas gift leaflet. We have to content ourselves with this notice, asking you to let us have your orders. If you care to enclose with your order a card of greeting (containing nothing besides the Christmas greetings except the name of the sender), it will be sent with the number with which the subscription starts. Subscriptions for six months can be accepted only for destinations in Great Britain and Ireland.

The Christmas Gift Subscription will, unless other instructions are sent, begin with the issue of December 16th. Orders should be sent at once, and should reach us in any case not later than December 9th.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Christian Frontier Council, and printed in Great Britain by the Church Army Press, Cowley, Oxford.